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ABSTRACT

Indian/Tribal Studies are the bedrock upon which 22 tribally controlled community colleges have been built since the mid-1950s. These colleges have put substantial resources, personnel, and time into building Indian/Tribal Studies programs into flagship academic, cultural, and language institutes. They exhibit common traits including tribal charters and control; objectives committed to enhancement, preservation, and teaching of tribal culture and Indian studies; focus on transfer and vocational/occupation programs; and dedicated boards, faculties, administrators, and staff. Through development of remedial programs, Associate of Arts and Science Degree curricula for students transferring to four year systems, and vocational/occupation programs, tribal colleges have assisted in meeting challenges threatening to destroy their way of life: economic hardship, artificial governments, dependency on the welfare state, alcohol induced health problems, foreign religions, and poor educational attainment. While Indian/Native American Studies programs in most private or state higher educational institutions are among the first to feel the effects of retrenchment, such programs are treated with respect in tribally controlled schools and will emerge as natural leaders in the effort to provide Indian/Tribal Studies at the higher education level. Present and future success of tribal colleges is due to the advocacy developed by today's tribal college leadership in Washington, D.C. (NEC)

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Indian/Tribal Studies Programs in the Tribally Controlled Community Colleges

ED279457

Wayne J. Stein

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There was a period of major growth within the community college system in the United States during the second half of the 1960's. Carried by this surge, a new phenomenon took place within the community college movement, the birth of tribally controlled community colleges (TCCC).

First to pull the necessary resources together was the large, powerful Navajo Tribe located in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and Colorado. The effort, led by Robert and Ruth Roessel, enlisted the help of community leaders, educators, tribal politicians, and combined funding from federal sources and private sources. The ability to organize and locate funding was a key to NCC's early success, but an additional factor was the founders' decision to use Navajo philosophy and culture as the bedrock of NCC's educational mission. This decision set a precedent of success which the following TCCC's all emulated to a greater or lesser degree.

Thirteen TCCC were chartered in the years between 1968 and 1975. The community college philosophy of service to the community, reflection of community educational needs in the curriculum, transferable general education curriculum, open door access to all community members and local governance lent itself well to the spirit of community still strong within most Indian tribal structures.

Service to the community is a key ingredient in the success of Tribally Controlled Community Colleges.

Tribal colleges were established across the western half of the United States, Alaska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Nebraska, and California. David Gipp of Standing Rock College, 1972; Jack Fiddler of Turtle Mountain Community College, 1972; Phyllis Howard of Fort Bethold Community College, 1973; Jerry Mohat and Lionel Bordeaux of Sinte Gleska College, 1970; Louie LaRose of Nebraska Indian Community College, 1972; David Riesling of D-Q University, 1970; Carol Juneau, Blackfeet Community College, 1974; were the early pioneers of the tribal college movement. They and many others brought to the tribal college movement a special dedication which when combined with the proper fiscal support explodes into a small but dynamic educational movement in Indian country.

These early tribal colleges all had several common traits:

1. They were tribally chartered and controlled;

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2. Their philosophical and mission statements were strongly committed to the enhancement, preservation, and teaching of their tribal culture and Indian studies;
3. A commitment to the development of a strong, two-year transfer program and vocational/occupational programs; and
4. Dedicated Boards of Trustees, faculties, administrators, and staff.

These common traits have helped the TCCC overcome several distinct problems.

1980 enrollments

Turtle Mountain Community College, 169 Full Time FTE
Blackfeet Community College, 199 FTE
D–Q University, 200 FTE
Dull Knife Memorial College, 53 FTE
College of Ganado, 82 FTE
Little Hoop Community College, 33 FTE
Nebraska Indian Community College, 129 FTE
Oglala Lakota College, 226 FTE
Sinte Gleska College, 187 FTE
Standing Rock College, 125 FTE
Navajo Community College, 900 FTE

These are low enrollment numbers when compared to the American Association of Community and Junior College's recommendations of 1,000 FTEs to support a successful college. They overcame a hostile Bureau of Indian Affairs, which administers the TCCC's federal base support funds, and the economic poverty prevalent in the tribal communities.

" . . . for a people to grow and prosper they must take those aspects of other cultures that work well and emulate them."

The northern plains tribes have a major commitment to education and this extends to higher education. The elders of the tribes have long recognized that for a people to grow and prosper they must take those aspects of other cultures that work well and emulate them. Sitting Bull told his people to take those things of the whiteman that would serve the Lakota well and discard those that were harmful. The high plains tribes have become masters at this practice and are matched by the Navajo in the Southwest, possibly this is the reason two-thirds of the TCCC are in Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

Cultures should meet and complement one another. Sharing experiences of the Tribal past, the present, and the world outside prepares the young for success in the larger world.

It is from this foundation that the different styles and methods of delivery of Indian/Tribal Studies Programs have developed and have grown within the tribal colleges. Navajo Community College led the way in the development of Indian/Tribal studies to build a Navajo/Indian Studies curriculum. They have established the importance of Navajo curriculum to NCC by giving real and philosophical support to the program. Navajo Medicine Men have been made a part of the staff and faculty of the college and conduct classes and as traditional ceremonies on behalf of the college and its students. NCC has built from this fundamental base by developing a contemporary Indian Studies Department, integrated curriculum and a NCC Press.

Each one of the twenty-two tribally controlled community colleges and Saskatchewan Indian Federated College of Canada have their own statement

on the role of Indian/Tribal Studies and how that role will be carried forward in fulfilling the mission of the college.

Salish Kootenai College of Polson, Montana states: "The college will help preserve the culture of the Salish and Kootenai tribes by bringing elders and tribal studies into the college to share with the students. To help the young gain the necessary tribal knowledge and education to then go with confidence into the larger world and succeed. To help present an accurate telling of tribal history so Indian and non-Indian will have a better understanding of each other, thus creating harmony on the reservation." Turtle Mountain Community College, Belcourt, North Dakota states: "The college will work to benefit all Turtle Mountain Chippewa people and will reflect in all its curriculum the Indian perspective." Sinte Gleska College, Mission, South Dakota states: "To impart and restore knowledge of certain aspects of Lakota Culture through the academic process and to provide basic education in non-Indian studies so students are well rounded in Lakota culture and higher education."

The academic process can be used to restore Tribal knowledge and provide basic knowledge in non-Indian studies.

Indian/Tribal Studies Programs play an important part in helping the tribes meet the challenges which would destroy their way of life. In Indian country, the tribe is under continual attack. This attack is perpetuated in many forms:

1. An economic system which is crippled almost beyond repair;
2. Artificial governments foisted upon the tribes by the federal government;
3. Dependency upon the welfare state;
4. Many health problems of which alcoholism may be the worst;
5. Foreign religions; and,
6. Generally poor educational attainment among the young.

The colleges recognize these pressing problems and have addressed them. This has been done through the development of remedial programs to bring Indian students to the post-secondary level; Associate of Arts and Science Degree curriculum for those students transferring to four year higher education institutions; and vocational/occupation programs to help students enter directly into the job market.

To give strength to all of these curricula the tribal colleges have reached into the communities and brought meaningful tribal studies to their students. They recognize that students will need more than academic or vocational tools to succeed in the competitive society surrounding their tribal way of life. Students will need to know who they are as an Indian person, what their tribe's culture is and how language helps to preserve all of these values.

Indian students need more than academic or vocational tools to succeed in the competitive society surrounding their Tribal way of life.

Several of the tribal colleges have built exceptional Indian/Tribal Studies Programs which are recognized on the national and international level of higher education. Navajo Community College, Sinte Gleska College, Oglala Lakota College, and Salish Kootenai College are the leaders in this area. Sinte Gleska College has recently developed a summer institute devoted to Lakota and Indian Studies. It has the potential to grow under the leadership of President Lionel Bordeaux, Victor Douville, and Stanley Red Bird into a classic Indian Institute. These colleges have chosen to put substantial resources, personnel, and time into building their Indian/Tribal Studies Programs into flagship academic, cultural, and language institutes. Other tribal colleges have smaller more integrated Indian/Tribal Studies Programs

and a few, such as Turtle Mountain Community College, have chosen to totally integrate their Indian/Tribal into the general curriculum. There are specific Indian/Tribal course work and integrated courses in the humanities, history, social sciences, psychology, religion, and science curriculum. Whatever method chosen to deliver the Indian/Tribal studies curriculum, each of the colleges has made it an integral part of their curriculum and college.

Tribal Community Colleges give a new forum to discuss Tribal concerns.

The results of this integration of Indian/Tribal studies into the college curriculum has paid dividends to the colleges and their tribes. Students have gained the necessary intellectual tools from the academic and vocational/occupational curriculum and the pride, knowledge, and strength from the Indian/Tribal curriculum to succeed. Communities now have an intellectual forum outside of federal or tribal government to discuss governmental reform, economic development, community development and other pressing concerns of the tribes. Role models and the word "college" have become a part of the young's lives in a manner they can relate to and emulate. Major repositories of tribal knowledge, language, culture, and heritage are building in the colleges and the true history of the tribes are being told.

To bring the Indian/Tribal Studies Programs of the tribally controlled community colleges into perspective the non-Indian higher education institutions must be briefly examined. Of the three thousand, two- and four-year institutions of higher learning in the United States a comparative few have a recognized Indian/Native American Studies Program or department. Most of these are found in the west and none make Indian/Native American culture and heritage an integral part of their philosophy or mission statement. Indian/Native American Studies Programs are not seen as central to the mission of the four-year institution and are considered peripheral to the students' educational needs. With few exceptions, the Indian/Native American Studies Programs labor in obscurity and have little true support from central administration, faculty, or the Board of Regents.

This comparison demonstrates that Indian/Tribal Studies are the bedrock upon which tribal colleges have been built, and which non-Indian institutions have chosen to ignore. Accrediting agencies, such as the North Central Association and North Western Association have noted the following strengths from this philosophy of the tribal colleges:

1. Powerful philosophical statements anchored in tribal culture heritage;
2. Major community support for the direction the colleges have chosen to go; and,
3. Exceptionally dedicated faculty committed to the mission of the college.

The current era of fiscal retrenchment which has belabored higher education across the country is also affecting the tribal colleges. However, a major difference becomes apparent when examining where institutions decide to cut back or cut out to make fiscal ends meet. Non-Indian institutions look to small, politically vulnerable, cultural/ethnic study programs as prime areas for reduction or elimination. Indian/Native American Studies, Black Studies, Asian Studies, and Chicano Studies Programs are usually the first to feel the weight of institutional retrenchment. Not so in the tribal colleges, here Indian/Tribal Studies Programs are treated with respect and are

usually one of the last places examined for possible cutbacks when there's a need to reduce the institution's budget.

Based upon the current trend in higher education to cut back on its services, it will develop that the only real support for Indian/Tribal Studies is in tribal colleges. The process of selection of programs to continue and to cut will be a natural one. Institutions will choose to keep those curricula they hold most valuable and will cut those they see as peripheral to the institutional mission.

Tribal colleges will emerge as the natural leaders in the effort to provide Indian/Tribal Studies at the higher education level. This outcome was foretold when the first tribal college succeeded and became a recognized institution of higher learning. Those tribes without tribally controlled community colleges will have to rely on tribal elders and local historians to preserve their language and heritage with minimal and sporadic support of public and private higher education institutions. Those tribes with tribal colleges will have an enthusiastic and scholarly effort to retain, impart to students, and enrich the tribe's language, culture, and heritage.

Tribal colleges will expand educational opportunities and enrich the tribe's language, culture, and heritage.

The present success and future success of the tribal colleges is due to the advocacy developed by today's tribal college leadership in Washington, D.C. They have developed rapport and support for tribal colleges among this nation's political leaders such as Senator Andrews, North Dakota; Senator Burdick, North Dakota; Senator Melcher, Montana; Senator Abnor, South Dakota; and Senator Simons, Illinois. This group of senators and their staffs have carried the fight for fiscal and moral support for tribal colleges many years in the Senate. The Representatives in the house, carrying the fight forward, have been Representative Dorgan, North Dakota; Representative Daschle; Representative Williams, Montana; Representative Killdee, Michigan, and their respective staffs. These national leaders have recognized the special place the tribal colleges have forged in Indian country and the real hope they bring to the tribes they serve.

The colleges look forward to many years of success even as they struggle with today's fiscal problems. This success is in no small part based upon the recognition of the unique and special role Indian/Tribal Studies will play in that success. Some may fail, others will grow and prosper, and more will spring up as tribes struggle to maintain their way in the face of huge odds. Indian/Tribal Studies Programs will continue to provide the necessary glue to hold tribal colleges together in the twenty-first century.

Wayne Stein, Turtle Mountain Chippewa from Wolf Point, Montana, is presently a doctoral candidate in higher education at Washington State University. Prior to returning to the University he served as President of Standing Rock College in North Dakota for five years. He also served as President of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium during the re-authorization effort of the Tribally Controlled Community College Act in 1984.